DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 127 791 FL 007 883

AUTHOR McIntosh, Lois
TITLE The Professional Teacher of English as a Second Language. CATESOL Occasional Papers, No. 1.
INSTITUTION California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 5p.; For related documents, see FL 007 882-888; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (San Francisco, Calif., April 26-28, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Education; *English (Second Language); *Language Instruction; Language Patterns; Language Skills; *Language Teachers; Language Usage; Professional Personnel; *Second Language Learning; Sociocultural Patterns; Teacher Education; *Teaching Methods; Textbooks

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the profession of teaching English as a second language. The problems encountered in classes taught by untrained amateurs are discussed, and the strategies of the professional teacher are outlined. She or he begins by finding out who the students are, what they need to know, and how they will have to use English. In this way, contexts that have meaning for the student can be provided. The language is to be taught as it is used in society and not in an artificial manner. Specific ways of getting at real language usage are described. The need for order in teaching is stressed, as opposed to a "bits and pieces" approach. Teaching language also involves the teaching of culture. This entails an awareness of the students' cultural background in order not to force some aspects of American culture on them too quickly. The professional language teacher should also be capable of effectively evaluating textbooks and teaching materials. (CLK)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED127791

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE PROFESSIONAL TEACHER OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE*

Lois McIntosh
University of California, Los Angeles

It is a pleasure to be speaking to you today, for I know that you are here because you are professionally inclined. Much of what I have to say will be familiar to you, but sometimes it is reassuring to know that we are all going in roughly the same direction.

As you well know, ours is a steadily growing and very important profession. Whether we teach the English language in our own country or abroad, our professional growth is increasingly recognizable. This well attended meeting is one example. And those of you who attended the National Conference in Denver last month must also have been aware of what we stand for, and you must have been proud of where we were going. The research on language acquisition, the discussions of the role of cognition in teaching, the arguments for codifying semantics, the serious work on bilingualism and biculturalism--all these subjects and many more attest to the growth and sophistication of a field that once was completely staffed by little old ladies in tennis shoes.

As a senior citizen in this profession, I have seen it grow to its present state in spite of the efforts of warm-hearted amateurs and cold-hearted exploiters. We have not stood still. There is much more to be investigated. There are better ways to share our language with others.

FL007883

Unfortunately, English as a first or as a second language has always been fair game for the untrained amateur. When our schools were full of native speakers of the language, and literacy was one of our goals, many people were sure that they could teach the subject because they had spoken English all their lives. Some of this spirit has spilled over into our profession as these examples will show.

First, INSTANT TESL. I am sure that this has happened to you. A breathless man dashes into your office, plane ticket and passport in hand. He is about to depart for faraway lands to teach the English language. What book should he take with him? No, he has never taught English--straight or second. But after all, he has spoken it all his life, and he enjoys travel. All he needs is a book. In ten packed minutes, he expects you to reveal the secrets of the profession.

I usually mention basic sentences, and the voicing rule that differentiates plurals as in dogs/x/, cats/s/ and horses/ez/ I push on to possessives: the dog's tail, the cat's tail, and the horse's tail. As I begin to give him examples of the same principle at work in the present and past tense verb endings,

* Paper presented at the California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Annual Convention, San Francisco, April 26-28, 1974.

again based on final voiced, voiceless or homorganic endings, a glazed look comes into his eye, and he excuses himself, no doubt muttering that these damned professors don't know enough to answer a simple question about a book. And off he goes to do his best or his worst overseas, getting well paid for his efforts, no doubt.

Then there is the entrepreneur who sees a chance for a fast dollar in all this. A gentle young man came to my office one day and asked a few questions about teaching English to a number of Koreans recently sponsored by a religious group. I gave him some advice, told him about our graduate training program and thought no more about him. After all, many students at UCLA volunteer their time to tutor groups of newcomers, and I thought he might be part of that effort.

A few weeks later he telephoned me. He had garnered a number of contracts, found a center to hold classes in, and would now like to employ some of our graduate trainees at $4.50 an hour. There was a notable lack of interest on the part of our students, but I'm sure the young man will find someone to help him on his way to millions.

I know that you can match these instances with similar experiences. And I'm sure you share with me the hope that if a teacher doesn't know about this profession, he will be honest enough and humble enough to seek substantive help.

I was discouraged to read in a recent edition of the California English Journal an article entitled: "Teaching English to the Foreign Born--It can be done". While I admire the ingenuity and dedication of the two teachers who took on a class of Spanish-speaking beginners, I deplore the extra work they made for themselves by not doing their homework better. First, they claimed that most teachers of ESL "review the details of syntax and morphology, which mean very little to the ESL student and result in broken English on the part of the learner." Instead, these teachers presented the English alphabet, and the students were asked to repeat the twenty-six letters with locally accepted phonetic values. Each student had to say A as we say it, not ah as so many of them say it. The teachers did have a sense of pattern--word patterns, that is. They grouped late, make, snake, take, pale saying that the students learned right away that final e is silent. In short they taught the students to speak, read, and write words. Then they moved on to sentences. They decided on declarative statements, imperatives, and the subjunctive to express wishes. Interrogative was introduced as part of each of these categories. The very terminology suggests an innocence about what we in ESL regard as part of the English system. Finally, and this was a real blow to me, they ended the article with the hope that some day proper texts would be written to help these beginners learn the English language.

And now, what do we professionals know about English as a Second Language? First, we find out who our students are, and what they need to know, and where and how they will have to use English. Are they small children in a pull out situation--children who need to have real experiences with language that they can absorb and use meaningfully. Are they restless adolescents who need per-

petual challenge? "Repeat after me" will never hold them. The professional teacher helps the student move along to a definite goal, providing him with contexts that have meaning for him, and basing the contexts on a systematic sequencing of the language. Is your learner struggling to survive in a tough, competitive environment? Do we with him stick to each word in a text written for more academically oriented learners, or take the sequence and create survival language for him?

As a trainer of teachers and writer of texts, I hope that every professional is concerned for his students first. I hope too that he keeps his ear on language, and teaches as it is spoken in our society. That means, for example, that when you ask: "Is this a book?" the answer should not be: "Yes, that is a book--but, "yes, it is." (The student is probably thinking--in his own language--do you think I'm stupid? Of course, it's a book.) But he still needs to control the vowel in It and is and a few other crucial sounds as well.

Do we teach the small courtesies of the language--how to acknowledge a "thank you" or an introduction? Are we insecure in our personal lives, and when students faced by Lesson One say it is too easy--as they often do--do we skip to Lesson Five to win friends and influence people?

The "bits and pieces" approach of some teachers is not professional. Before the class has controlled the three basic sentences formed by BE, relative clauses are brought in for variety. When, in a beginning class, you skip lesson one, you are putting your students on the first floor with no foundation under them. You can make a lesson more sophisticated by introducing elipsis early on--"X is a student and Y is too. X isn't a teacher, and Y isn't either." You can expand a lesson on time from "It's ten to ten" to "It's noon in San Francisco, what time is it in New York? In Tokyo? These are just further ways to practice sentences based on BE.

If your students are not beginners, but Lesson One is centered on Be, teach it as a review, but teach it anyway. They're going to need that sentence again and again. Be aware of sequencing materials. For Modals--don't line them all up in front of a verb and expect the learner to understand how they are used in real life. Group them: You'd better take an umbrella. It might rain. Or, you must stay home tonight, but you don't have to stay tomorrow night.

The advanced learner needs different handling from the beginner. Two Master's studies nearing completion at UCLA are aimed at them. One is a series of tapes of real language as spoken in McDonald's, at the registration desk of a motel, and other likely spots where natural English can be overheard and recorded. The students listen for the main points of the conversation and they must interpret the many unbookish utterances that they hear.

The other study has a few students arriving at a consensus as they solve a problem together--what to do about a car accident, how to break a date, and the like. The other part of this activity is acting out situations as they interpret the behavior of Americans in different situations.

One more study involves students seeing themselves on video-tape as they engage in communicating in English. The purpose here is to help them shape their personalities when they perform in a foreign language.

Studies like these made by future professionals are adding good dimensions to language teaching.

And in teaching language, we are, of course, also teaching culture. Here is a place for tactful awareness of the degree of sophistication of your students. ture is a word that has many interpretations. In 1974, this country has streakers, Watergate, and a fairly permissive society. Some teachers like to use the column conducted by Dear Abby as a source of cultural information. In many ways it's a good one, as many writers reveal their troubled lives, and get brisk advice from the columnist. But in a beginning class in English, the letter about the advisability of giving the Pill to a fifteen year old had repercussions. A beginning class is just struggling through a lot of first language interference, and the background of the students may not be as permissive as ours is. There was embarrassment and confusion in that class, and a real professional would never have chosen that bit of Americana for students at that level of language.

More innocent revelations can come about in comparatives, for example. X swims well. Y doesn't swim well. Does Y swim worse than X? No, he doesn't swim as well as X. X is thin; Y is fat. Do we ask how thin X is? We can. Do we ask how fat Y is? No, and in many other cultures this could not be cricket either. In our zeal to get all the words in, let us not violate the cultural code.

At every conference, and in every mail, you are beseiged with publishers' announcements about yet another ESL text. As professional teachers we need to be able to evaluate these books. Is the text suitable for the age and needs of the learner? Does the language sound natural or bookish? Is the sequencing so done that one structure can build on another or that some persistent problems are re-introduced from time to time. Is the vocabulary load heavy, or not heavy enough? We professionals need to ask these questions as we look over the many offerings in the field.

We need all the time, attention, and training available. We should value the language we are teaching. We listen to it and use it well. We do our homework, go prepared to every class, use materials creatively, tailoring them to the needs of the learners in our classes. And as a goal, every class we teach should have this purpose----that the students, all of them, not the 85% beloved of the behavioral objectivists, will leave the room with another slice of this language that they will feel confident in trying out with their peers. And if the student uses English naturally and accurately, native speakers and his peers will be pleased to hear him, and he will be able to communicate with the world. Then, we professionals will corsider our efforts well worth doing.